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Time to Put the Spotlight on The CIA In Laos

Twenty-one U.S. Senators are sponsors of Senate Joint Resolution 77 to set up a Joint Committee on Intelligence,* which would supervise the CIA. The resolution has been before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for several months without action. This would be a good time to demand hearings on the bill and to make those hearings a vehicle for an inquiry into CIA activities in Laos. A Washington dispatch in *The Times* of London May 24 (see adjoining box) declares that the CIA has been sabotaging U.S. policy and encouraging Phoumi Nosavan, the rightist leader, to resist Administration efforts to create a new neutralist coalition regime. The story reverberated in the foreign policy debate which took place later that day in the House of Commons, but so scanty was the attention paid it by the U.S. press that many Senators here with a sharp interest in the CIA are unaware of the charges. They are similar to those in *Le Monde* (Dec. 17-18) which we reported in our issue of last January 8. According to an on-the-spot survey in that paper, the efforts of the U.S. Ambassador to bring Phoumi into the coalition were undercut by CIA agents and the U.S. military.

Phoumi's Closest U.S. Adviser A CIA Man

The London *Times* story was denied by Lincoln White, the State Department's briefing officer. But Senators who inquire in those sections of the Department in touch with Laotian affairs will find that in this, as in the case of the U-2, Mr. White has been erroneously informed. The U.S. press has not been at all enterprising in going after the story. The London *Observer* (May 27) in reporting the denial added a tantalizing detail. "It is true," its Washington correspondent cabled, "that the chief CIA operator [in Laos] is still the same man as when the agency supported General Phoumi. . . ." The paper's correspondent in Singapore added that while it was incorrect to accuse the CIA of undercutting U.S. policy in Laos the individual CIA representatives there—

are privately opposed to a compromise with the neutralists and pro-Communists. They urge that if necessary the country be partitioned . . . or that the Vientiane government should at least be helped to retain full control of towns and principal communications, even at the risk of war. This view encourages right-wing Laotian leaders to refuse to come to terms with their enemies—particularly as Gen. Phoumi's closest personal American adviser is a senior CIA officer.

Our own inquiries have led us to believe that the *Times* account is correct. Thailand has long been a CIA stronghold, as was indicated some years ago when the Burmese government complained that CIA operatives were using a trading

What the London Times Reported

"It is not easy to acquire all the details in such a murky situation, but apparently the evidence shows that the swarm of CIA agents in Laos deliberately opposed the official American objectives of trying to establish a neutral government. They are believed to have encouraged General Phoumi Nosavan in the concentration of troops [in Nam Tha] that brought about the swift and disastrous response of the Pathet Lao.

"It is also officially believed that the heavy pressure brought upon Prince Boun Oum and General Phoumi to accept the political solution of neutrality, including the suspension since February of the monthly subsidy of \$3 million, failed because the agency provided them with some funds from its own capacious budget. The belief is that the agency transferred the money from its operations in Siam, where General Phoumi has family connections.

"It will be recalled that the CIA played a large role in bringing about the downfall of Prince Souvanna Phouma, who was ousted by the General in 1960. . . . The result of their clandestine efforts is the defeat, and perhaps total demoralization of the Royal Laotian forces; the commitment of American forces on the Asian mainland and a deterioration of the political situation. . . ."

—The Times (London) from Washington, May 24

company in northern Thailand as a cover to tunnel supplies across the border to Chinese Nationalist troops in Burma. The Cuban affair last year should be a reminder that the White House is not always either well-informed or really obeyed by the CIA; a pro-Batista CIA agent, and an ignoramus on Latin American affairs to boot, went on in charge of operations at Miami long after authoritative sources at the White House assured reporters that he had been removed. It is difficult enough to get the State Department only a few blocks away to carry out White House directives which run counter to cold war conditioning. It would be naive to believe that secret operatives in so huge and well-heeled an organization as the CIA meekly carry out orders with which they are not in accord. The Laotian affair would not only provide a test case with which to evaluate the proposal for a joint committee on intelligence, it would also throw a scare into the gumshoe operators and help the White House bring the Laotian negotiations to a successful conclusion. There is no reason why the chief CIA man in Laos cannot be brought before a secret session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for questioning.

To read the London *Times* parliamentary report which has just arrived here of the foreign affairs debate May 24 is to

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* The 21 are: McCarthy, Anderson, Morse, Clark, Metcalf, Burdick, Bartlett, McNamara, Humphrey, Carroll, Long (Mo), Moss, McGee, Talmadge, Hickey, Case (S. Dak), Pell, Prouty, Young (Ohio), Hart and Williams (N.J.).